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THE
HISTORY

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AND THE

MYSTERY

OF

GOOD-FRIDAY.

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GOOD-FRIDAY.

IT has always been accounted good policy in the church of Rome to withhold the Holy Scriptures from the laity, and to perform the public worship of Almighty God in Latin, a language unknown to the people. A religion founded on the infallible judgment of one man, and requiring of all the rest of mankind an absolute submission to his dictates, ought not to be examined; for, should the people emerge from credulity, and rise into reason and faith, the bold Pretender to Infallibility would tumble from the pinnacle of pontifical dignity into a gulf of universal contempt.

That wise and vigorous set of men, the Protestant Reformers, broke open the papal cabinet, exposed his pretended titles to public view, and did all in their power to simplify religion, and to reduce it to its original plainness and purity.

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They

They laid open the inspired writings, they taught the right of private judgment, and they summoned all mankind to enter into that liberty with which Jesus Christ had made them free.

If these men had a fault, it lay in the breadth of their scale; they aimed to convert whole nations at once, and to change their customs in a day. Many religious customs were incorporated with civil rights, it was irreligion in ecclesiastics to exercise civil government, and it became therefore essential to the accomplishment of their plan to call in the aid of secular powers. Secular powers readily assisted them; but at the same time obliged them to keep measures with royal prerogatives, court factions, the intrigues of the old clergy, and the prejudices of the common people. They therefore left the reformation unfinished, and died in hopes that their successors would complete in happier periods what they had begun. Far from entering into this just and liberal design, we seem to have lost sight of it, and to have adopted principles subversive of the whole. We seem to have discarded piety, incorporated luxury, and the few who have not given up all sense of shame, endeavour to conceal the scandal under a cover of superstition. Thus we affect modesty, and dance naked in a net to hide our shame!

Superstition is to religion, says one, what astrology is to astronomy, the foolish daughter of a wise mother. These two have long subjugated mankind. We have no objection in general against days of fasting and prayer, they have always the advantage of retaining a scriptural form of godliness, they are often edifying, and sometimes necessary. Nor do we find fault with those Christians who make conscience of observing all the festivals of their own churches. They have a right to judge for themselves, and their sincerity will be rewarded. Neither will we suppose the English clergy to have been deficient in teaching their people, that all practical religion divides into the two parts of moral obligations, and positive institutes; that the first are universal, unalterable, and eternal; and that the last were appointed by legislature to serve the purposes of the first. But as the cause of moral rectitude can never be pleaded too often, nor the nature of it explained too clearly, as superstition is very apt to invade the rights of religion, and as numbers who have great interest in these articles have not leisure to trace them through folios, it may not be unseasonable, and we trust it will not be deemed impertinent, to expose to public view in brief the history—the authority—the piety—and the polity of church

holidays. To discuss one is to examine all, and we select for this purpose that day, on which, it is reputed, the founder of our holy religion was crucified, commonly called GOOD-FRIDAY.

The HISTORY of Good-Friday.

Let no one blame an historian who does not begin before his records, it is not his fault, it is his virtue. Strictly speaking, all documents in Protestant churches should be found in the holy canon; for the people of each church refer an inquisitive man to their clergy, their clergy refer him to their printed confessions of faith, and all their confessions refer him to Scripture. There are many ceremonies in some Protestant churches which do not pretend to derive themselves from Scripture immediately, but they were appointed, they say, by those who were appointed by Scripture to ordain them. The examination of this appointment does not fall under this article, and we defer it to the next. At present we only observe, Good-Friday is a ceremony of this kind, and the original records of pure Christianity say nothing about it.

Neither any one Evangelist, nor all the four together, narrate the *whole* history of Jesus Christ, nor yet *all* the circumstances of those parts

parts on which they enlarge most. St. John, the last of these historians, closes his history with a declaration, that *many things* relative to Jesus Christ were *not written*. The times of the birth and crucifixion of our Saviour are so written in these authentic records, that nothing certain can be determined concerning them. All who have pretended to settle these periods are conjecturers, and not historians, as their variety proves. There is only one opinion in the whole Christian world concerning the country of Jesus Christ, and the place of his nativity; all allow he was a Jew, and born at Bethlehem. We should be equally uniform in our belief of the times of his birth and crucifixion, had Scripture as clearly determined the last as it has related the first. There are more than one hundred and thirty opinions concerning the *year* of his nativity, and the *day* of it has been placed by men of equal learning in every month of the year. There is a like variety of opinions concerning the time of his crucifixion. Let us respect the silence of the oracles of God. No argument can be drawn from it to endanger Christianity. A point of chronology is not an object of saving faith, nor is zeal for an undecided question any part of that holiness, without which none shall see the Lord. The inspired
writers

writers did not design to make laws about feasts, but to enforce the practice of piety and virtue.

The first congregations of Christians consisted of native Jews, Jewish proselytes, and Pagans of different countries, and of divers sects. Each class brought into the Christian church some of their old education prejudices, and endeavoured to incorporate them with the doctrine and worship of Christianity. The Apostles guarded against this unnatural union, and, during their lives, prevented the profession of it; but after their decease they were made to coalesce, and from this coalition came Good-Friday, and other church holidays. Christianity affirmed the facts—proselyte mathematicians guessed at the times—pretended scholars accommodated prophecy and history to the favourite periods—and devotional men, whose whole knowledge consisted in an art of turning popular notions to pious purposes, began to observe the days themselves, by the austerity of their examples they gave them a sanctimonious air to others, and so recommended them to the observation of all who chose to be accounted pious as well as wise.

We hear nothing of Easter till the second century, and then we find Polycarp, Anicetus, and others conferring on the time of keeping it, celebrating it at different times, and exercising a mutual

mutual toleration notwithstanding their differences. Jesus Christ was crucified at the time of the Jewish passover. The Christians of Asia celebrated Easter on the *fourteenth* day of the moon, according to the law of Moses, on whatever day of the week it fell, so that if they kept some years a Good *Friday*, they also kept in other years Good *Monday*, Good *Saturday*, or Good *any* day, for the day of Christ's crucifixion must be at its due distance from the day of his resurrection. These Eastern Christians pretended St. John kept Easter so. The western churches used to observe the *Sunday* after the fourteenth day of the March moon, and they said St. Peter and St. Paul always did so. If these Christians could not convince one another in times so near those of the Apostles, it is not likely we should be able to determine the time of Easter now. We have nothing more then to add here, except that they debated and differed like Christians, they tolerated one another, they communicated together, and the liberal temper of such disputants is always edifying, however idle we may think the dispute.

About the year 190 Victor I. then bishop of the church at Rome, had the audacity to excommunicate those Christians who kept Easter on the fourteenth day of the moon. The excommunicated

communicated pitted his pride, and persevered in their practice. The Roman bishops intrigued, caballed, got councils called, and at length the council of Arles, held in the year 314, having no doubt the fear of God before their eyes, and being endued with more wisdom, more power, or more presumption than their predecessors, DECARED that *all* churches should celebrate Easter on the *Sunday* after the fourteenth of the moon of March, when that moon should happen after the vernal equinox. Eleven years after, the council of Nice confirmed this decree, and the Emperor Constantine enforced it by orders sent into all the provinces of the empire. The council did not think to provide for one difficulty which might arise, which might produce a new *diffention*, and throw down that idol, *uniformity*, which these Christian Nebuchadnezzars had committed so many crimes to set up. The fourteenth day of the full moon in March might fall on a Sunday. It did so. A difficulty started, and different opinions followed. The Eastern churches celebrated Easter on the day of the full moon, when it fell on a Sunday in March. The western Christians deferred it to the Sunday following. How could a synod of 318 bishops, they were but men, foresee this difficulty!

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In the seventh century, one of our petty kings, Oswy, having been instructed in the Christian religion by Scotch-Monks, kept Easter after the Asian fashion, while his queen, who had been taught by a Roman priest, observed it in the western way; and it sometimes happened, that his majesty was joyfully celebrating our Saviour's resurrection, while the queen was fasting on account of his crucifixion. To get rid of this inconvenience, the king summoned a council to meet at Withby to determine the original time of Easter. The clergy on the one side rested their cause on tradition derived from St. John, while the clergy on the other urged that which came from St. Peter. The king was judge, the balance inclined neither way, and long was he perplexed with authorities quite equal, at length being informed, that, however great St. John might be, St. Peter kept *the keys* of the kingdom of heaven, the king very prudently took care of the main chance, declared for St. Peter, and Easter has fallen on a Sunday in England ever since.

Good-Friday had the fate of all other holidays, it had a solemn service composed for it, and, being established by civil power, the people were obliged to fast—and to pray—and to say—and to sing—and so on to the end of the chapter.

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When

When king Henry VIII. reformed the British church, although he discarded many festivals, yet he thought proper to retain Easter, and Lent its appendage. The old service was afterwards new vamped, and during the succeeding reigns of Elizabeth and the Stuarts many were persecuted for refusing to comply with it. That inestimable prince, William III. procured a toleration, the present august family protect it, and the inhabitants of this country now enjoy the liberty of keeping festivals, or of renouncing them.

The history then in brief is this. Neither Good-Friday, nor any other Fasts or Feasts were appointed to be observed by the Lord Jesus Christ, or his apostles. The time of Christ's birth cannot be made out, and that of his crucifixion is uncertain. Could we assure ourselves of the year, we could not prove that the Jews observed the regressions of the equinox, nor that they made use of accurate astronomical tables. No traces of Easter are to be found in the first century, nor for a great part of the second. When the first observers of it appeared, they could not make evidence of their coming honestly by it. Councils decreed that it should not be kept before the 21st of March, nor after the 26th of April. Some, however, kept it on the 21d
of

of April, while others celebrated it on the 25th of March; others at times different from both, and others kept no day at all. Our ancestors murdered one another for variety of opinion on this subject: but we are fallen under wiser and better civil governors, who allow us to think and act as we please, provided the state receives no detriment; so that the language of Scripture is spoken by the law of our country, *He who regardeth a day, let him regard it to the Lord: and he, who regardeth not a day, to the Lord let him not regard it.* What good christian can refuse to add a hearty Amen!

The AUTHORITY of Good-Friday.

Dull and uninteresting as this poor subject may be as an article of history, it becomes extremely important, when it is foisted into the religion of Jesus Christ, enjoined on all christian people under pain of his displeasure, and considered as the livery of loyalty and piety. In such a case, the disciples of the Son of God are compelled to enquire, whose are we, and whom do we serve? His we are whom we obey.

Should a man from an idea of the christian church from reading the New Testament, in which Jewish ceremonies are said to be a yoke,

which neither the Jews of Christ's time, nor their ancestors were able to bear—in which those rites are called weak and beggarly elements—rudiments of the world—shadows of good things to come, of which Jesus Christ was the substance—and should he then behold a christian church loaded with ceremonies of pagan and Jewish extraction, there would naturally arise a violent prejudice in his mind against this modern church, and he would be obliged to enquire what Joab had a hand in this alteration.

It must be allowed, consummate wisdom—cool and unbiaſſed judgment—rectitude the moſt rigid—and benevolence and power the moſt extenſive, are abſolutely and indiſpenſably neceſſary qualifications in religious legiſlation. The nature of God and Man—the relation of each to the other—and of both to all the countleſs conditions and circumſtances of all the reſt of mankind—the kind of worſhip—and the manner of performing it—the neceſſary requiſitions of juſtice—and the proper effuſions of goodneſs—with a thouſand other articles from one grand complex whole, which would baſſle all, except infinite penetration, in forming a ſyſtem of real religion.

As an aſſumption of legiſlative power in religion is an aſcent to the moſt elevated degree of honour,

honour, and as it requires a kind of submission to which human dignity is loth to bow, so, it must be supposed, the clearest evidence of a right to exercise it is naturally expected. No blind submission—no precarious titles—no spurious records—no popular clamour—nothing but clear revelation expounded by accurate reasoning can be taken in evidence here. An immortal intelligence is the noblest production of infinite power and skill—when it pays its homage to the Deity it is in its noblest exercise—and no mean guide must conduct such a being then.

On these just principles I take up Good-Friday where I find it, as part of the established religion of my country, and I modestly enquire the authority that made it so. A few old women refer me to the fourth verse of the twelfth of Acts for the word *Easter*, and I return the compliment by referring them to their grandsons at school, who say St. Luke wrote *passover*. I could, were I inclined to revenge, be even with these old ladies by telling the tale of Lady Easter, Ashtar, or Ashtaroth, a Sidonian toast: but I am too busy and too placid now, and I take my leave of this goddess, and also of the godly translator, who profaned a Jewish fast by nick-naming it after a pagan prostitute, and laid the blame on innocent St. Luke.

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'The established clergy do not pretend to support their festivals by authority of Scripture: but they say their legal authority arises from that act of parliament, which ratified the thirty-nine articles of their faith, one of which affirms, *the church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith*. This clause is said by them to mean, that the "governors of the church have power to determine what shall be received and professed for *truth* among the members of the church, and to bind them to *submission* to their sentence, though they err in their sentence." These are their own words.

These thirty-nine articles were first produced in a convocation of the clergy in the year 1562—they were reviewed by another convocation in 1571—and were afterwards ratified by parliament. It is an unquestionable fact, that the religion of all the good people of the church of England was, in 1562, put to the vote of one hundred and seventeen priests, many of whom could hardly write their names, and several of whom were not present, and voted by proxy, and that ceremonies and holidays were carried by a majority of *one* single vote, and that given by proxy. Whether the absent member, who had the casting vote, were talking, or journeying, or hunting, or sleeping, is immaterial, he
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was the god almighty of this article of English religion, and his power decreed rites and ceremonies and matters of *high behest*.

The insertion of the above clause of the CHURCH's *power* in the twentieth article was an infamous piece of priestcraft. It is not in king Edward's articles. It is not in the original manuscripts subscribed by the convocation, and still preserved in Bennet College, Cambridge, among the papers of Bishop Parker, who was president of the assembly—It was not in the printed book ratified by parliament—It was not in the latin translations of those times—nor did it dare to shew itself till twenty-two years after, as Heylin, and other high churchmen allow.

Subscription to this clause is mere mummery; for what does it mean? The *church* power to decree rites and ceremonies! An absolute falsehood. One person in this church, and one person only hath power to decree rites and ceremonies. The common people pretend to none. The clergy have introduced organs—pictures—candles on the communion table—bowing towards the east—and placing the communion table altar-wise: but they had no right to do so; for as the Common Prayer book no where enjoins them, they are expressly prohibited by the act of uniformity, which says no rites or ceremonies

ceremonies shall be used in any church . . . other than what is prescribed and APPOINTED to be used in and by the Common Prayer book. By what effrontery does a priest allow organs in public worship after he has subscribed to the truth of an homily, which declares them superstitious! Or with what presumption does he dare, in direct opposition to act of parliament, to invade a prerogative that belongs to the crown! Neither a convocation, nor an house of commons, nor a house of lords, nor all together have a power to decree rites, ceremonies, and articles of faith in the established church of England, the constitution has confirmed it as a royal prerogative, and annexed it to the imperial crown of this realm.

In former times our kings ceded this prerogative to the pope, at the Reformation they re-claimed it, and long after the Reformation they refused to suffer the other branches of the legislature to examine, or to meddle with it : but in later times this prerogative was bounded, and now it is restrained to the national established church. By the act of toleration the crown agreed to resign, and in effect it did actually resign this prerogative in regard to the Nonconformists, and this cession is become a part of the constitution by the authority of the whole legislative power of the British empire. The mode of restraint,

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indeed

Indeed, is not so explicit as it might have been ; but the fact is undeniable.

The English Nonconformists think civil government natural, necessary, and of divine appointment—they suppose the *form* of it arbitrary, and left to the free choice of all nations under heaven—they believe the form of *mixed monarchy* to be the best—but were they in Venice they would yield *civil* obedience to aristocracy ; in Holland to a republic, or in France to an absolute monarchy, the best mode of civil government making no part of their religion—They think in all states impliedly, and in the British most expressly, there subsists an *original contract* between the prince and the people—they believe the *limitation* of regal prerogative by bounds so certain that it is impossible a prince should ever exceed them without the consent of the people, one of the principal bulwarks of civil liberty—they think there are *ordinary* courses of law clearly established, and not to be disobeyed, and they believe there are *extraordinary* recourses to fix principles necessary when the contracts of society are in danger of dissolution—they think these principles alone are the *bases* of prerogative and liberty, of the king's title to the crown, and that freedom which they enjoy under his auspicious reign ; and these, their sentiments,

are those of the wisest philosophers—the ablest lawyers—and the most accomplished statesmen, that Britain ever produced.

The English Nonconformists absolutely deny all *human* authority in matters of religion—they deny it to *all* civil governments of every form—they think Jesus Christ the *sole head* of the Christian church—they say the *Scriptures* are his only code of conscience law—All the articles of their belief are contained in *his* doctrine—all their hopes of obtaining immortal felicity in *his* mediation—all their moral duties in the great law of nature explained by *revelation*—and all their religious rites, and ecclesiastical law in *his* positive institutes unexplained, or rather unperplexed by human creeds—they say Jesus Christ himself does not require obedience *without evidence*—that they submit to him, *as God gave him*, as a prophet, a priest, and a king, on the fullest proof—they say their religion has nothing hostile to *civil government*, but is highly beneficial to it—that although it is no part of it to determine the best form, yet it is a part of it to submit in civil matters to the powers that be. On these principles they justify the apostles for embracing Christianity, when religious governors rejected it—the first missionaries, who subverted established religions by propagating it—the

the reformation from popery—and the revolution, that dethroned high church tyranny. For their civil principles they are ready to die as *Britons*, and for their religious ones as *Christians*.

But we have lost *Friday*!—no wonder. Good-Friday is a rebel against the king of kings, and always when loyal subjects approach him the traitor lurks behind, skulks among popes and priests, and hides his guilty head in a cowl, muttering—*the church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies*. Ah Sirrah!

The article of authority, then, amounts to this. In that system of religion, which goes on the principles of the perfection and sufficiency of Scripture, and the sole legislation of Jesus Christ, Church-holidays are non-entities. In those systems, which allow human authority, they rest on the power that appoints them. In this happy country the power that appoints them, is constitutionally bounded, and has agreed to spend its force on as many as choose to submit to it, and to exert itself against all who dare to impede, who choose to renounce it. So that the authority, which appoints a Good-Friday ceremonial, has just as much influence over a British subject, as he himself chooses to give it. If he choose to be a member of the national church, to which certainly there are many wordly in-

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ducements,

ducement, he allows human authority over conscience, and he ought in conscience (if it be possible for conscience to agree to its own dissolution) to keep the fast: but if he think proper to dissent, to which certainly there are strong religious inducements, he is protected in disowning the authority, and the obligation is void. When human wisdom affects to adorn a religion of divine revelation, it presumes to paint a diamond, or to lace and embroider the seamless coat of one, whose simplicity is his evidence and his church's glory. When such as Austin and Gregory, primitive manufacturers of trumpery, imported their bales, and offered their wares to the British church, they were objects of pity or contempt; but when they presumed to use coercive measures to make the denizens of heaven purchase their trash, when a pope like Judas came in the night with halberds, and swords, and staves; when, worse than he, the traitor did not bring even a lanthorn to enable men to read his commission—Merciful God! couldst thou be angry with our ancestors, for hand-cuffing the felon, and whipping him out of their isle! The punishment was too little for the crime. They should have burnt even his rags with fire!

*The fury fiend with many a felon-deed,
Had stirr'd up mickle mischievous despight.*

The PIETY of Good-Friday.

If piety be the discharge of duty towards God, there are only two short questions to answer. First, is the observation of an annual fast in commemoration of the death of Christ, a *duty* required by almighty God? Next, how is this duty *discharged* by those, who think it a duty?

All duties, which God requires of all mankind, are contained in the moral law. Moral obligations are founded in the nature and fitness of things. There is a fitness between the care of a parent, and the obedience of a child. Filial obedience is therefore a moral duty. There is a fitness between civil government and taxes. Governors protect subjects, and subjects ought therefore to support governors. Taxes for the necessary support of government are therefore dues, and the payment of them moral obligation. But nobody ever yet pretended to make the celebration of Easter a part of the moral law.

The other class of duties required of all Christians is contained in positive institutes. Baptism is a positive institute; the celebration of the Lord's supper is a positive institute. They would
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not have been obligatory, they would not have been known, had not the Christian legislator instituted them; and they are obeyed now they are appointed in proper submission to his authority. But has he appointed this fast? Does it not wander about a mere beggar actually destitute of every token of a legitimate divine institute?

Since, then, the observation of this day is no part of piety, we are driven, for want of materials to fill up this article in decent guise, to the sad necessity of turning the tables, and of considering the *impiety* of this black, this bloody Friday. Were we to collect into one aggregate sum the impious actions that belong to the introduction, the establishment, the support of ceremonies, one of which is this day, were we to balance accounts between moral law and human institute, we should be obliged to charge to the latter a most enormous and ruinous sum. We should set down the unwarrantable implication of the imperfection of Christianity as Jesus Christ appointed it—the incorrigible obstinacy of judaizing bunglers, who united a provincial ritual with an universal religion—the rash enterprizes of minute philosophers, who associated the mummeries of Belial with the miracles of Christ—the paltry babbling of traditionists, whose impertinence put them on pretending to give evidence

evidence to wise and grave men by their senseless repetitions of, I heard say, that he heard say, that she heard say, that they heard say—the self-employed and uncommissioned racket of councils—the daring achievements of those knights errant the popes of Rome—the base concessions and self-contradictions of their hierarchical squires—their flattering, betraying, befooling, deserting, and assassinating emperors and kings—the subverting of all sound maxims of civil polity, every dictate of right reason, the sacred bonds of society and the natural rights of mankind—the degrading of magistracy, the banishment of thousands, the bloodshedding (O where shall we end?) All these under a mask of hypocrisy,—a pious pretence of uniformity—the erection of *a godlye order in Christen states amonge the holye flock that Iesu boughte with hys owne bloode!* I know I shall be reputed a silly enthusiast for what I am going to say; but what care I? When the bells chime to call people to celebrate Good-Friday, methinks they say to me, *count the cost thinking Christian, count the cost*—I do so, and I weep . . . Am I not a fool? . . . I can't help it . . . I pour out floods of tears to think what human ceremonies have cost all mankind, and particularly what a dreadful price my native country has paid for them—and I wish

with with Luther, that there were no feast-days among Christians, except the Lord's day. All Christians are not of our opinion. Some think the observation of this day a duty of religion. Very well. I wish to be instructed. Permit me to see how the duty is discharged,

The far greater part of the members of the established church pay no regard at all to Good-Friday, nor do some of them know why it is appointed. There is no piety surely in professing a religion, which is neither understood nor obeyed. The greater part of opulent members of this community pay no other attention to the day than dining on fish in preference to flesh. This is not piety. Numbers of the clergy read the ritual, and deliver a sermon composed by others, and this is their whole performance. Most artificers, and people of the lower class, imitate their superiors. Some of them do not observe the day at all, and others, who hate work worse than witchcraft, go in the morning to church, and in the evening to the alehouse, and there deposite piety till Easter Sunday, and then travel the same round again. Should a man lay aside secular affairs, abstain from food, dress in black, go to church, say after the parson, hear the sermon, and close the day without company and cards, who but a methodist would pretend to arraign

raign the conduct of this man? And yet, most certain it is, he may do all these without performing one act of genuine piety.

In short, there are two general parents of religious action, custom and conscience. The first terminates, and produces a blind, sordid, sorry, crawling lusus, denominated religion; but really superstition. The latter, conscience, may be enervated by ignorance, sloth, scrupulosity and secular interest, and in this ill state of health may produce a weak family of genuine moral virtues, and of silly deformed superstitions: but, being right in the main, she will always pay her first and chief attention to her moral offspring, Positive institutes, and even human inventions, may be obeyed by people of this kind; but they will never encroach on the rights of natural, necessary, moral law. If the ceremonial of religion supply the place of religion itself—if the former derogate from the latter—if the former divert the attention from the latter—it becomes a reprehensible superstition.

What then shall we say of those, whose whole piety lies in the observation of *days, and times, and years*? We know what an inspired apostle said to such people, *I am afraid I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.* Father of universal nature! in vain hast thou given us capacity, learn-

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ing, reason, and religion—in vain does the knowledge of all antiquity shine around us—in vain has the law of nature been explained to us by the writers of revelation—in vain hast thou bestowed thy best and richest gift the gospel on us, and a government that allows us to judge of it—We live in the open violation of all thy laws—we curse and swear and blaspheme—we profane thy holy sabbaths—we are guilty of drunkenness, debauchery, perjury, simony, bribery, implety, and irreligion of all kinds—our children are uneducated in religious principles—our property is wasted in gaming and amusements—our priests and our prophets exemplify luxury—and we expect to avert all our deserved miseries, and to atone for all our impieties, by saying, have we not fasted on Good-Friday, and feasted on Easter Sunday? The Jewish priests, at the worst of times, prophesied for hire; but some Christian priests take the hire and prophecy not. They vote indeed! but say, ye plundered Nabobs! ye French Canadian Papists! ye widows and orphans! ye depopulated cities, and ruined commerce of rebellious colonists! say, for what do British ministers of the prince of peace vote? . . . They vote that yon wheelwright's children must fast on Good-Friday! This leads us to the last article.

The POLITY of Good-Friday.

Before Christianity was understood in the world, the first apologists for it *thought themselves happy*, as St. Paul expresses it, when they were called to defend it before equitable civil magistrates in courts of legal judicature. They had great reason to rejoice in these opportunities, for they taught a religion, which recommended itself to all just governments by its perfect agreement with civil polity. Primitive Christianity wanted only to be known, it was sure to gain ground by being understood. These divine men were able to say—Is the origin of civil government sacred? We teach, that civil government is ordained by God.—Is the well-being of the whole the supreme law in civil polity? So it is in Christianity.—Do states flourish, when the people yield a ready obedience to civil government, and venerate the dignity of magistracy? Christianity inculcates this.—Do temperance, industry, piety, and virtue render states happy? Christianity forcibly inculcates these.—Are states happy when discords do not prevail, when kind offices abound among citizens, when benevolence and philanthropy pervade the whole? Christianity abolishes party factions and odious distinctions.

distinctions, and curbs the passions that produce them; and as to universal love it is the religion of Jesus itself.—Do states enjoy tranquillity when learning and liberty, conscience and virtue are nourished, and when impartial equity rewards merit, and restrains and punishes vice? Christianity does all these.—Are states safe, when they retain a constitutional power of redressing grievances, of insuring life, liberty, and property from foreign and domestic invasion, and of reducing all cases to one invariable standard of impartial and universal justice? Christianity inculcates principles productive of all this. No instance therefore can be produced of our attempting to subvert civil government; on the contrary, we are entrusted with a conciliating plan of universal peace between secular and sacred things by Jesus Christ.

The corruptors of Christianity deprived it of this noble plea; they bartered purity for power, exchanged argument for authority, and made a scandalous truck of all the truths and virtues of religion for the seals of a prince, and the keys of a goal. They invented words of inexplicable mystery, and inflicted penalties on those, who could not interpret their dreams—they cast innumerable canons, and with them destroyed the lives, and liberties, and properties of their
peaceable

peaceable brethren—they armed priests with secular power, and covered their barbarous use of it with infinite pomp—they exalted princes to hate, persecute, banish, and burn their subjects for matters of conscience—they thought lay subjects beneath notice, kings above law, and themselves above kings. To their conduct it is owing, that most great men consider religion as nothing more than an engine of state.

We hope Christianity in time will recover from these deadly wounds: but healing and health must never be expected from such prescriptions as are made up of the false principles that produced the hurt. The great, the only object of such books as Hooker's church-polity, and Gibson's codex, is the support of the hierarchy. God knows, no positions can be less true, no principles more dangerous than those laid down in these compilations. Civilians sufficiently fee'd could build the whole fabric of popery on them; for the evident drift of them is not only to render the church independent on the state; but to place the state in a condition of dependence on the church. Their system is false in itself—inconsistent with Scripture—incompatible with the British constitution—and destructive of Christ's spiritual design. These writers have lodged their sentiments in the dark caverns of metaphorical style,

style, and there they lurk in seeming asylum. There is an imaginary being called the *church* governing distinct from the church governed—this animal has *son*, in violation of the English language, and the laws of precise argumentation—*She* is either married or a prostitute, for she is a *mother*, it seems, and has children—All this may be rhetoric; but nothing of this is reason, less still can it be called religion, and least of all is it that religion which Jesus taught, and which never diminishes the glory of civil polity.

The religion of Jesus is the most simple thing in the world. His church was not formed on the plan of the Jewish government, either of the state, temple, sanhedrim, or synagogue—nor on that of any other state, either that at Rome, or that at Athens.—The decree of the christian church at Jerusalem, called by mistake the *first council*, was advice; but not law.—Canons in the primitive church were opinions devoid of coercion; the emperor Justinian adopted them, and metamorphosed them into civil law—there were in the primitive church no coercive powers—particular churches were united only by faith and love—in all civil affairs they were governed by civil magistrates, and in sacred matters they were ruled by the advice,
reasons,

reasons, and exhortations of their freely elected officers—their censures were only honest reproofs, and their excommunications were nothing more than declarations that the offenders were incorrigible, and were no longer accounted members of their societies—the term *hierarchy* was unknown, and *hierodulia* would have been the proper description then—It was a spiritual kingdom not of this world; it did not injure, it could not possibly injure sound civil polity. The primitive christians were taxed with holding seditious principles: and this calumny they merited for not getting drunk on Cæsar's birth-day—for holding their religious assemblies in the night, when secular business was over—for refusing to swear by the genius of Cæsar—for scrupling to give him the titles that belonged to God—for talking of a kingdom of saints upon earth—however, these sons of sedition prayed for Cæsar—taught all due obedience to him—paid his tribute—fought in his wars—treated all inferior magistrates with profound respect; and these things they did not for prudential reasons of worldly policy, but from examined and adopted principles of genuine christianity.

The whole farrago of a secular religion is a burden, an expence, a distress to Government, and every corrupt part and parcel of it is some way

way or other injurious to civil polity. Consider a kingdom as one large family, sum up the priesthood into one domestic chaplain, compare what he costs with the good he does, and judge whether the family gains as it ought, or loses as it ought not by his chaplainship:

To come to the point. We apply these general strictures to one article, consisting of fasts, feasts, and holidays. We divide these into five classes, and discharge four of them. In the first we place all those *obsolete* holidays, which were in vogue before the Reformation, such as the Assumption—the Conception—Silvester—Britius—and such like, which were very properly retained in the calendar at the Reformation for law uses, for the ascertaining of the times of tenures, and of the payment of dues—or of charitable donations, that were dated by these days. In a second class we put all the *Sundays* in the year; for although some divines hold the morality of the Sabbath, and others place it among positive institutes, yet all agree in the necessity of keeping a day, and a pious clergy know how to improve it to the noblest uses of church and state. In a third we put all *red-letter days*, as coronation days, birth days, and others. The suspending of business on those days is a very proper compliment to our civil governors,
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and the healths and spirits of gentlemen confined in public offices require relaxation and exercise. Nobody pretends to make religion of these, and they are on many accounts quite necessary. In a fourth class we put all those *Saint's days*, and other holidays, which the clergy are obliged by their superiors to observe. They ought not to complain, if they are required to fast on the 30th of January for the expiation of a crime, which nobody alive committed; for they are amply rewarded by many a festival, from which none but themselves ever derived the least benefit. All these we dismiss, and retain only a fifth sort of holidays, which constitution and custom engage the whole national church to observe; the smallest number of these is TEN. A very little attention will convince us, that the observation of these ten holidays is productive of no real advantage; but, on the contrary, of much damage to the nation at large.

As these festivals are generally observed, they hurt the healths, the morals, and the little property of the poor—they depress virtue, encourage vice, and generate superstition—they clog business, burden the clergy, increase the rates of parishes, endanger the peace of the society at large, perplex magistrates—in a word, they impoverish

rish the kingdom in proportion to the extent of their influence.

To examine only one of these articles: Suppose a day labourer employed all the year at seven shillings a week, that is, at fourteen pence a day; ten days of his time are worth to his family eleven shillings and eight pence. Not to earn is to pay, and this poor fellow is actually at the annual charge of eleven and eight pence for the support of festivals. Let us suppose farther, that his wife earns six pence a day, and his four children four pence each, at spinning, stone-gathering, or any other work; ten days of the woman's time are worth five shillings; ten days of each child are worth three and four pence. So that this man's wife and children pay for festivals eighteen shillings and four pence a year. We are farther to add the extraordinary expences of this family on these days; for it is all a farce to talk of their fasting, they have no fasts in their calendar, all are festivals with them, and they never fast when they can get victuals. We allow the poor man, then, one shilling on each day to spend at the alehouse, and his family one more for tea, beer, nuts, gingerbread and so on. We are to add then twenty shillings more to his account, and his reckoning stands thus:

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benefits, and they ought to pay for the liberty, is equal to saying, the sober populace might get drunk at the Dog and Duck, and they ought to pay the reckoning of those who do.

Whatever advantages they derive from church-holidays, many of their neighbours derive great disadvantages from their sinking fifty shillings annually to support them. This poor fellow should pay thirty shillings a year rent for his cottage; but the landlord never gets it, yet he would thank him to pay his rent by ten days work for him. He can pay no rates to the parish, nor any taxes to government; yet were he allowed to earn fifty shillings a year more than he does, he could pay both, and save money to buy a pig, or a bullock, or firing too. He owes something to the doctor for physic, and something to the shop for food, debts contracted in lyings-inn and illness, he can pay none of these dribbets; yet he could pay all, were he allowed to earn fifty shillings a year more, and to deposit it for payment of debts in his master's hands. Moreover, he got drunk on the feast of the Epiphany, which he called Twelfth night—set up a score at the alehouse—rolled in the dirt—spoiled his clothes—lost his hat—fought with Sam Stride, who sent him a lawyer's letter, for which he paid six and eight pence, beside a guinea to
Stride

Stride to make it up—and on the same night he gave Blue Bridget nineteen pence for the liberty of leaving a bastard to the parish—magistrates were tormented with warrants, and oaths, and depositions—peaceable subjects with the interruptions of riot and debauchery—the whole business of the parish stood still—and the industrious were obliged to pay out of their honest gains the whole expence at last.

What! it will be said, would you keep these people in eternal employment, and allow them no holidays? I would keep them in perpetual employ. Six days they should labour, and do all they have to do, the seventh, being the sabbath of the Lord their God, the clergy should so perform divine service as to engage them voluntarily to choose to fill a religious assembly; their children should be catechised, and rational and agreeable pains should be taken to instill the great principles of religion into them; they should be taught a practice of piety, and a course of virtue; religion should be unmasked and exposed in its own beauty to their view; at present it appears to them an unmeaning encumbrance of expensive forms. Their infants are questioned, and sprinkled—their wives pay a shilling and are churched—they are generally funny at a wedding, and feel no expence but the ring—they eat

eat cross buns on Good-Friday—they are merry at Easter—and mad at Christmas—they pay small tithes through life—and are buried in form when they die—and they call this the Christian Religion in the best constituted church in the world, and abuse all who think otherwise as knaves or fools, ignorant of God and disloyal to the king! As to holidays, let the poor take as many as they can afford, and their masters can spare. Far be it from us to wish to abridge their liberty, or diminish their little enjoyment of life: but let us not make religion of their gambols, nor enroll their pastimes among the laws of Jesus Christ.

There were in the ritual of our ancestors above two hundred festal days, many of them in seed-time, hay-time, and harvest. Great complaints were made to parliament; the church, it was said, would ruin the state. While the people were telling beads, and the priests chanting and spouting away, the corn lay rotting in the fields, cattle were neglected, commerce was at a stand, and the nation was starving. Legislature struck off first harvest-holidays, and then others, and what remain were left for a decoy to papists, to the great grief of numbers, who submitted to them, and who wished to get rid of superstition, the root and the rind of popery.

If any imagine these festivals necessary for the sake of informing people of the events that are commemorated on them, and of preserving and perpetuating the remembrance of them, we only beg leave to ask—Where was Christianity so well understood as in the primitive churches, which celebrated none of them? Where is the Christian religion less understood than in the Roman community, where they are celebrated without end? Who understood Christianity best, our Saxon ancestors, who had many festivals, or our immediate parents, who had few? Is religion better understood in these reformed churches where they are celebrated, than in those where they are omitted? Does religion consist in the bare remembrance of a few events in the life of Jesus Christ? May not all the ends proposed by the observation of church-holidays be better answered without it? Do we not sacrifice many great advantages, and put ourselves to unnecessary inconveniences and expences for mere shadows, which can never be substantiated without civil coercion? Is not the likeliest method to make the clergy loath the necessary parts of their office, the obliging of them to drudge alone in unnecessary exercises?—Many articles are omitted—under-rated—and half reasoned—but we

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have said enough—perhaps too much—on the ill policy of Good-Friday.

Should any parish priest of genuine and generous piety (far to sycophants and bigots we have nothing to say) who loves God, reveres his king, wishes well to his country and to all mankind, should such a man say, I mourn for the vices and calamities of my country, and I dread those chastisements of Providence, which national sins deserve. I wish to contribute my mite to the publick good; but I know no better way of promoting it than by inculcating the observation of fasts and feasts, and approved rituals. I would venture to say to him,

Reverend Sir! I give you credit for being a man too wise to quibble about style, where matters of the highest importance are in hand, and too good to be offended with the honest bluntness of one, whose reigning passion is to wish felicity to all mankind. Pardon me, then, if I take the liberty to say—The cool, disinterested part of mankind consider a hierarchy as they consider a standing military force. In absolute monarchies, where the main principle of the constitution is that of governing by fear, an hierarchy is essentially necessary to the despotism of the prince; but in free states an hierarchy will always justly be an object of jealousy. Hierarchical powers

powers have found many a state free, and reduced each to slavery: but there is no instance of their having brought an enslaved state into christian liberty. Your country, Sir, is the only one in the universe, in which civil liberty is the very end and scope of the constitution. You should therefore acquaint yourself well with all the singular polity of this country, which is governed by a system of laws all tending to the one great design, civil liberty, and you should not put off the man, the citizen, and the christian, when you put on the clerical character.—You profess a religion, Sir, which agrees with civil polity; you know how some of your order have deprived it of this glory by resisting or duping their civil governors in order to aggrandize themselves. Recover that character to Christianity, which those crimson tools of a desperate cause, Austin and Lanfrank, Dunstan and Anselm, Thurstan and Becket, Longchamp and Peckham, Arundel and Chichley, Woolsey and Bonner, Parker and Whitgift, Bancroft and Laud, have vilely squandered away. Leave secular affairs to secular men. Have no more to do with commissions of the peace, county elections, commissions for roads, the civil affairs of hospitals, corporations, and so on, than what you cannot possibly avoid. You may have rights as a gentleman; but it is

not necessary you should lay aside the character of a clergyman for the sake of asserting them. Civil government administered by clerical men always inspires the lay gentry with jealousy, and the poor with contempt. In your office, be no aspiring statesman's tool for filthy lucre's sake. Do not dare to lift your unhallowed hand against the sovereign's title to the crown, and the people's right to liberty, by brandishing the obsolete and execrable doctrines of passive obedience, non-resistance, the divine rights of kings, and all the unconstitutional positions, which the supreme legislature consigned to eternal oblivion at the glorious Revolution. Your superior may put you on uttering what he dare not utter himself in order to feel the popular pulse, and he may procure interested hirelings to applaud you, and promise that preferment to you, which he intends for himself. If you perish in the attempt, what cares he? But do not deceive yourself. The present royal family will never prefer men of arbitrary and unconstitutional principles. His majesty perfectly comprehends the British constitution, and as he magnanimously aspires at the glory of reigning over a free people, who have confidence in his wisdom and goodness, it is impossible he should smile on those, who lay the ax to the root, the constitution, and would
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by one fatal blow fell those admired branches his title and his people's liberties. Stir up no strife in your public preaching, nor teach your parish to abhor an inhabitant of it for praying in a barn. Never persecute for religion's sake. Never oppress conscience. Never discountenance piety in other communities, lest men should think you not a minister of religion, but a tool of a party. Never condemn denominations in the gross, nor impute principles and practices to them, which they abhor. Sow no jealousies and discords in families. Cultivate the general principles of Christianity more than the peculiarities of your own party, and the rights of all mankind rather than the ritual of a very inconsiderable part of them.—You are the minister of a religion famous for its morality. Do nothing to weaken this evidence of its divinity.

Avoid all gross vices, drunkenness, adultery, lying, blasphemy, sabbath-breaking. It is not enough for you to abstain from swearing and lying, you must not take the Lord's name in vain, nor allow yourself to prevaricate. Abstain from what Scripture calls *filthiness of spirit*, pride, levity, hypocrisy, avarice, discontent, distrust, mental immoralities. Practise all the moral duties of both tables, and let your flock see as well as hear your doctrine. Have no fellowship

with those unfruitful works of darkness, gaming, horse-racing, frequenting taverns and ale-houses, play-houses, opera-houses, balls, assemblies, masquerades; avoid also hunting, shooting, dangling at the heels of Sir Robert, cringing at the levee of my lord, and fetching and carrying for my lady, of all which, whatever may be said for secular men, not one can be proper for you. The minister of Christ must at least appear to be a man of delicate and refined moral virtue.— You are a minister of a revealed religion. Study the Holy Scriptures, distinguish the doctrines of revelation from the discoveries of philosophers; the precepts of Christ from the prudential saws of Epictetus; the doctrines and laws of his kingdom from human creeds and worldly maxims, and do not imagine that classics and mathematics, novels, and plays, contain a body of christian divinity. Never turn the sacred truths of revelation into ridicule, nor call *being born again*, *fearing the Lord*, *praying by the spirit*, the cant of a party. The phraseology of Scripture may have been misunderstood; but you should not discard both comment and text; you have adopted the book, and you ought to explain its meaning. Avail yourself of all opportunities of disseminating Scripture knowledge. Catechize the children, and the poor in your parish.

Carry

Carry religion home to their bosoms. Lay aside the self-important haughtiness of a priest, and put on the meek and humble temper of your Master. Go into the cottages of the poor. Encourage their meeting together to pray and to read the Holy Scriptures. Teach them to set up family worship, to perform a course of domestic devotion, and, above all things, never countenance the profanation of the Lord's day, but teach them to reverence and improve it.— You are, Sir, a minister in a rich community. Your country gives you good wages, and they expect at least some work. Employ your emoluments to better purposes than those of dress and equipage, Sunday visits, midnight revels, assemblies, simoniacal contracts, and such like. Detest the miserable disposition of hoarding wealth, and dread being possessed with the rage of rising to preferment. Remember, all church emoluments are fiduciary, and they lapse into the public hand, when the services for which they were granted, are not performed. Flatter the vices of no patron; but with a modest boldness reprove them. Dare to be upright. Despise the shame of singularity. Touch no sine-cures. Renounce needless pluralities. Do not plead for non-residence, and, if you must have a curate, let him share both work and wages.—It would be

be tedious to you, were I to go through the duties that are annexed to all offices from the curate up to the metropolitan of all England, and I will only beg your patience, while I add, in general, avoid the six vices, that disgrace too many of your order—destroy the prejudices of deists and infidels—allow, at least, the probability of some defection—and adopt the course prescribed by the oracles of God.

The principal vices that disgrace the priesthood are; 1. *Ignorance* of a body of Christian divinity. 2. *Perjury*, if they subscribe upon oath their belief of propositions, which they have either not examined, or do not believe. 3. *Ambition*, expressed in a haughty reserve in private life, a vain and pompous parade in public, a pedantic affectation of wisdom of words in their public preaching, by which they sacrifice the edification of a whole congregation to the silly vanity of shining as men of genius. 4. *Insatiable avarice*, ten thousand times more tenacious of a four-penny Easter-offering than of all the ten commandments. 5. *Time-serving*, always pursuing those measures which serve their own interest, surrendering to it philosophy and divinity, the interest of their country and the honor of their God. 6. *Hypocrisy*, acting a part, recommending Christianity by office, and establishing

ing paganism by inclination, at church in masquerade, and at a play in their native character. Such priests as these turn the heavenly manna into poison. They give the enemies of religion cause to blaspheme, they are the ridicule of Atheists, and the reasons of Deism! Be it your holy ambition, Sir, to wipe off the foul prejudices that defile the face of a weeping reformed church. Your community is suspected of symbolizing with popery, for Parpalio the Pope's nuncio offered in the Pope's name to confirm your service-book. All reformed divines own, the distinguishing characters of that apostate church are *three*, superstition, tyranny, and immorality. Are there no evidences of your possessing these gloomy marks of Antichristianism? Are your morals incorrupt? Do you place no religion in habits, places, words, and forms? Have you resigned the unrighteous dominion over conscience, that in less inquisitive times your order unjustly acquired? Have you like other penitents joined restitution to repentance? Have you expelled no students for praying and reading the Scriptures? denied ordination to no candidates on account of their holding the doctrines of your own articles? suspended and persecuted no clergymen for preaching more zealously than yourselves? Have you

you awed none into silence, who would speak if they dare? What said you to your petitioning colleagues? and what to the dissenting clergy, whom you flatter, and soothe, and call brethren in Christ? Are they freed from oaths, and subscriptions, and penal laws? Christian liberty! thou favourite offspring of heaven! thou first-born of Christianity! I saw the wise and pious servants of God nourish thee in their houses, and cherish thee in their bosoms! I saw them lead thee into public view! All good men hailed thee! The generous British Commons caressed and praised thee, and led thee into an upper house, and there . . . there didst thou expire in the holy laps of spiritual Lords! . . . Allow, it is not impossible, it is not improbable, it is very likely, that MAY have happened in Christianity, which has happened in law; multifarious statutes have obscured plain common law. Changing the term law for divinity, I will recite the words of one of the chief ornaments of that profession. The Christian religion has fared like other venerable edifices of antiquity, which rash and unexperienced workmen have ventured to new dress and refine with all the rage of modern improvement: hence frequently its symmetry has been destroyed, its proportions distorted, and its MAJESTIC SIMPLICITY exchanged

ed for specious embellishments and fantastic novelties. For, to say the truth, all niceties and intricacies owe their original not to Scripture divinity, but to additions and innovations, often on a sudden penned by men, who had none, or very little judgment in divinity. . . . In fine, Sir, feed the flock of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood—Covet no man's silver, or gold, or apparel—Warn every one night and day with tears—Serve the Lord with all humility of mind—Keep back nothing that is profitable to us—Teach us publicly, and from house to house—Testify to Jews and Greeks neither worldly politics, nor human inventions, but repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ—Watch in all things—Do the work of an evangelist—Make full proof of your ministry—Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine—Meditate upon these things—GIVE THYSELF WHOLLY TO THEM.—Do these things, and then, when you are become venerably hoary in the best of services, finish your course with joy—take Britain and her colonies, protestantism and popery, Canada and China, your own church and other reformed churches, heaven and earth, to record that you are pure from the blood of all men—Quit the world like your divine Master, and ascend to heaven, you

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blessing

blessing us, and we admiring you. . . . But if, on the contrary, neglecting all the duties of your office, and practising all the vices that ever provoked the patience of God and man—If you enter the church by that door, by which Ananias was turned out, professing to be moved by the Spirit of God, while you are actuated only by ambition or avarice—If so far from coming up to the spirit of those qualifications, which are required to ordination, you fall short of the very letter, either in learning, morality, or knowledge of theology—If you subscribe thirty-nine articles, three creeds, the genuine and the apocryphal Scriptures, the books of prayer, ordination, and homilies, and swear canonical obedience to one hundred and forty-one canons, without having read, examined, and believed the whole—If you take the oath of supremacy, and hold, that the church hath legislative power—If you abjure Popery upon oath, and yet hold the principal articles that support it—If you swear allegiance to his Majesty, and teach anti-revolutional principles—If you obtain preferment by simony direct or indirect—If you take charge of 2000 souls, and never speak to 1900 of them—If you hold contradictory doctrines while you profess uniformity—If you have a catechism, and never teach it—If you neglect your duty to hunt
 after

after preferment —If you enjoy the emoluments of a spiritual office in person, and do the services of it by proxy—If you hate reformation, and depreciate and persecute those who would reform you —If you misrepresent peaceable subjects, taxing them with heresy, schism, and republicanism, and strive to render their loyalty to the crown, and their love to the constitution doubtful—If you profane Sabbaths, and ordinances of divine appointment—If all your study is to make a fair shew in the flesh—If you mind only earthly things, your god being your belly, and glorying in your shame—and vainly imagine to cover all these crimes by observing a Good-Friday, and so to gull mankind into a persuasion of your sapience and sanctity—know of a truth—the time may come, when your civil governors may see it as necessary to reform your reformation as their ancestors did to reform the religion of your predecessors—till then, although the religion of pious spectators will not suffer them to hurt a hair of your head, yet the same religion will oblige them to say of you—This evil man talks of light, while his feet are stumbling on dark mountains—his country and the small remains of his own conscience, the canons of his church and the laws of the state, the liberalities of his prince and the tears of his brethren, the

ashes of Burnets and Hoadleys and Eardners,
the just judgments of heaven on degenerate
priests and incorrigible nations, all call him to
his duty, and warn him of the danger of fall-
ing into the hands of an angry God—if he will
not hear, our souls shall weep in secret places
for his ignorance and pride.



F I N I S.